

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BEHA'ALOTECHA

Haftarah: Zechariah 2:14-4:7

JUNE 2, 2018 19 SIVAN 5778

DEDICATION: In memory of Moe D. Gindi Moshe Ben Victoria

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EDITORS NOTES

Second Chances & A Light at the Window -5773

I knew a man who went through a terrible and bitter divorce. He battled for years. There were no winners. There were only losers. The bitterness of battle entered his bones. And a decade later it remains with its cohorts, anger, depression, jealousy and rage. The darkness consumed him and spread to those around him. I never saw him smile again.

I knew a man who was very wealthy. He had everything that money could buy. Homes, cars, boats and all the trappings were his. He enjoyed every day of his life. And then one day, it all disappeared. The business, the money, the homes, and the toys were all gone. But the man realized there was more to life. He could have sunk into the misery of despair, but he didn't. He didn't stop working. He didn't stop trying. Every day was a gift. Every day was an opportunity as long as the sun rose for him. I never saw him frown. I never saw him complain. And although he lived out his days without much, he was happy with what he had. His smile remained day in and day out and reflected in those he touched.

I knew a man who lost his young child in a sudden accident. He told me that it was a time so terrible that one could not even imagine the nightmare. He thought he would never recover. How could he? But within the darkness, he decided to light a match. The match became a light bulb and the light bulb a beacon. Through this child's death, he rose up and decided to make a difference. And with his family, they touched thousands of lives in their acts of kindness. Not only did he smile again, but he brought countless smiles to countless people.

This week we read the portion of Behaalotecha and within the words of the Torah one finds a message of a world where one can wallow in his own depression and complaints, or a world of second chances, of raising the spirit and of clearing the darkness away.

The choice is ours.

Towards the end of the portion we read: They cried out, "who will feed us meat? We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free" along with the watermelon, cucumbers and scallions. "And now our souls are dried, all we see is the manna." How quickly does one forget one's past struggles, the slavery, the killing of their children, the bricks, the hard labor and lack of freedom? How quickly does one forget the miracles of life, the exodus, the splitting of the sea, the revelation at Sinai, the well, the man and the clouds? With a lack of appreciation, one quickly falls down the slippery slide into sadness, depression and darkness. Complaining is just the first of the symptoms.

Contrast this with the concept of Pesach Sheni which we read about this week. At the start of the second year in the desert, some of Benai Yisrael cannot bring the korban Pesach because they are ritually impure due to contact with corpses. They don't want to miss out on bringing the offering, and ask Moses for a second chance. G-d informs Moshe that they can wait a month, and bring the korban on the 14th of Iyyar. Too many people who see an opportunity slide away or who fail at something in their lives are overcome by that failure. They often believe that a missed chance will never come again. They see the window close and believe it will never open again; rarely realizing that their own belief is what keeps the window shut, and rarely trying to open it themselves. One must never forget that very few people who are successful are successful without having failed. King Solomon teaches us that, "a righteous man can fall seven times and rise, but the wicked shall stumble upon evil." These people, who come to Moses, refuse to simply stand by and see opportunity slip by. It's so important to remember that more than I want a second chance; G-d wants me to succeed.

The message is loudest at the outset of the portion where Aaron is commanded to light the Menorah. The verb used is not to kindle the fire, but to raise up the flame. And this commandment comes each day to that Aaron who resides within each of us, the priest, the pursuer of peace, the cheerleader. That voice must remind us to raise the flame and raise our spirits. Rabbi Uriel Vigler writes, "A flame is among the most intriguing phenomena in this world. Its

incessant flickering grants it a mysterious quality that can only be defined as a frantic bid to return to its source. The wick of the candle is the flames only deterrent of its goal, ensuring it remains down below, where it belongs. But the flame constantly struggles against this force, desiring to cleave to its source and become nullified within it. Traditionally, the soul of man is compared to a glittering flame: "ki ner hashem nishmat adam" the Talmud tell us. The similarity is seen in the soul's inherent desire to connect with G-d, to cleave to its source above, thus transcending this material world, while at the same time wishing to remain inside a physical body."

We must be like the flame, always rising up. The Hebrew word ner – candle or flame – is made of two letters, a nun and a resh. It cannot be a coincidence that the physical item we choose to represent the soul uses the two letters that represent the soul. Our lowest level of soul is the Nefesh or life force, the next is the Ruach or spirit and finally the Neshama or higher soul using a Nun, Resh, Nun.

The thought is echoed in Aaron's raising of each Levite. Again he is raising us, but more that, we use the word tenufah which in Hebrew can also allude to momentum. We must keep rising, we must keep going forward. We must never stop. When we stop, we don't simply stay where we are. We fall backwards.

The dark side's greatest power is simply in being the dark side. Intimidating that there is nowhere to go, its tools are sadness and depression. We pray three times each day that G-d should remove from us yagon – sadness and anacha – depression, but in those words allude to the forces of the dark side whose success lies in our own gloom from which we fail to rise. This is our greatest enemy, an enemy which attacks from within.

"So it was, whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, Arise, O Lord, may Your enemies be scattered and may those who hate You flee from You." Again words from this week's portion; words we repeat each time we open the ark to take out the Torah. Ki Ner Misvah VeTorah Ohr - For a misvah is a candle, and the Torah is light.

When one reveals light darkness is forced away.

Life is filled with failure. We all fail time and again. And failure often leads to sadness and depression. But there is where we have the choice. We can wallow in the bitterness and the bitterness will take over our very existence. Or we can appreciate each day as the opportunity it is and set aside the sadness

and get up. We can add to the darkness or become a source of light to the world. We can frown or we can smile. We can bring sadness or we can bring joy. Hashem gives us a second chance and a third and a fourth. The door is never closed. More than we want the light, He wants to give us the light.

So when you find yourself falling into that pit of darkness, catch yourself. Yes, it's difficult. And no doubt, you think you'll never make it out of this mess. But ask for His help. Lift yourself. Find that inner strength. Reach into your immortal soul. G-d promises, if we simply crack open the window a bit, he will lift it open for us completely. Become a phoenix.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

This is the week to get back into reading the weekly parasha! After the 2nd half of Shemot discussing the mishkan and virtually all of Vayikrah discussing korbanot and purity, and the last two parshiot dealing with counting Benei Israel and korbanot for the inauguration of the mishkan the weekly parasha is finally exciting again (it's always exciting. But now it's really exciting)! And these are the parshiot we didn't really learn so much in school considering they take place during the Summer months. So now is the time to get back into it! Parashat Be'ha'alotecha takes place with Benei Isreal leaving Har Sinai for the first time since receiving the Torah. They are preparing to travel 3 days toward Eretz Israel and are poised to enter the land any day.

**Aliyot 6 and 7 are particularly interesting!

Be'ha'alotecha - The Leviim are made kadosh, Benei Israel's first traveling from Har Sinai

1- Menorah, The Leviim are purified and made kadosh

2- The Leviim replace the bechorim to do the avodah
3- Korban Pesach in the midbar, pesach sheni for those who were tameh

4- How Benei Israel traveled in the midbar by way of the the amood ha'anan, amoond ha'esh, and trumpets

5- Israel's first traveling from Sinai - order of camps and how they traveled. Yitro returns home

6- Complaints about the traveling and about the manna. Moshe's despair. 70 Zekenim are chosen to help Moshe

7- Hashem sends the quail. Miriam speaks lashon hara and gets tzaraat

In this week's parasha Hashem tells Moshe to purify and make holy the Leviim. All their hair was shaved off and they dipped in the mikveh. Benei Israel then did semicha supporting their hands on the Leviim (similar to what is done by a korban). Aharon then waived each Levi as a waive service before Hashem (representing their status as a symbolic offering to Hashem). Hashem goes on to tell Moshe "the Leviim were given over unto me in place of the firstborns". And now they will be the ones that perform the service in the ohel moed. And we learn that the reason the firstborns lost their right to perform the holy service and the Leviim received it was because the firstborns were involved in the sin of the egel. And the reason the Leviim received the right to work in the Beit ha'kikdash and became consecrated was because they were the ones that stepped up during the sin of the egel when Moshe said "mi laHashem elay" and they killed many of those responsible for the sin of the egel. And reading this part of the parasha had an impact on me. It made me think about how far reaching our actions can be (whether for good or bad). Kohanim are fortunate enough to go up and make birkat kohanim today because of an action their forefathers did 3k years ago. How amazing is that! And the opposite is also true that our grandchildren and community could suffer because of actions we do today. And I thought this idea was very powerful. The people we are, the people we strive to become, the things we value, the way we spend our time, they affect what our children value. They affect who our children become and they affect who their children become. It's an amazing thing to know that my act of hesed today can and will affect generations to come. Hopefully we can be reminded of this every time we see the kohanim go up for Birkat kohanim and it will make us think of the amazing opportunity we have to do great things and affect the world.

Le'refua shelema Elisheva bat Esther and Eliyahu ben Yvonne Chava

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"And the people did not journey until Miriam was brought in" (Bemidbar 12:15)

At the end of our perashah, Miriam, the sister of Moshe, speaks slander against her brother. Miriam loved her brother very much, but she spoke out to put an end to what she felt was an injustice against Siporah, Moshe's wife. Despite her good intentions, Hashem didn't like the slander, lashon hara, and He punished Miriam with leprosy. Moshe prayed for her and she was healed, but she had to remain outside of the camp for seven days until she was allowed to return to the camp.

The Torah tells us that a great honor was done to Miriam. The nation did not travel for seven days in order to wait for Miriam's return. Rashi explains that this was an honor due to her because she waited for her brother Moshe. When Moshe was a baby and he was placed in a basket and floated onto the Nile, his sister, Miriam, waited to see what would come of him. She was paid back now, that the entire nation waited for her. However, this might seem difficult, because after all, what was her great merit? It seems she was merely satisfying her curiosity!

We can explain this with the words of Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, z"l. He says that after 120 years a person will be asked by Hashem, "vguahk ,hphm - Did you wait for the redemption (Mashiah)?" He is not asked, did he hope for redemption, but did he wait for the redemption. Waiting implies that he knows for sure that the Mashiah will come. He is just waiting for when it will happen. This was Miriam's greatness. She knew Moshe would be saved; she was just waiting to see when and how he would be saved. In that merit, the entire nation waited for her.

We all know the arrival of Mashiah is close by. However, don't hope that he comes - wait till he comes.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Aharon did... as Hashem had commanded Moshe." (Bemidbar 8:3)

On this pasuk, Rashi explains that Aharon was praiseworthy because he followed Moshe's instructions completely. It is surprising that the Torah felt it was necessary to tell us this. Would we expect anything else from such a great person like Aharon?

This can be understood based on the following story. There was a great Rabbi, known as the Meshech Chochmah, who had an attendant who always served him faithfully. Once the Rabbi made a very strange request, and the attendant felt that it didn't make sense, and did not do as the Rabbi requested. The next day, when the Rabbi questioned him, the attendant admitted that he didn't do it because it didn't make sense to him. The Rabbi then told him, "You've worked for me for so many years and you never once listened to me!"

The attendant was perplexed. "What do you mean? This is the first time I didn't listen to you!"

The Rabbi said, "No. You just showed me that if you don't understand me, you don't listen to me. That means you only do what you think makes sense, and you never truly listen to me."

This is why the Torah praised Aharon for following Moshe's instructions totally. Even if there may have been something which he didn't fully understand, he still performed the task, trusting that his teacher, Moshe, was correct.

Our hachamim have instituted many rules and regulations to help us to serve Hashem and to avoid violating the Torah. Sometimes it's difficult for us to understand the reasoning behind the halachah. Especially when the rule is restricting us in a way that we don't want to be restricted, it's very tempting to say that the law doesn't make sense and doesn't need to be followed. But that would indicate that we are not really serving Hashem in the best way. Of course it is good and proper to ask questions when we don't comprehend, but we shouldn't let that get in the way of our performance. Let's commit to follow the guidelines of the hachamim wholeheartedly even when we don't understand them. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

No Quick Fix

Achieving happiness is the lifelong goal of most people, yet so many find it an elusive fantasy. One of the problems with finding happiness is knowing exactly what it is. To some it is the absence of pain. Yet that is not happiness; it is comfort. Happiness is a state of mind that follows achieving a goal, overcoming an obstacle, or stretching yourself to grow closer to your still unachieved potential.

Happiness is hard work that shows results. There are really no quick fixes to get you there. Some people try drugs or alcohol. When you achieve a goal or overcome an obstacle, you feel a sense of inner worth that doesn't fade so quickly.

When you confront a new challenge, don't cower in fear and employ avoidance tactics. Welcome the opportunity to flex your free-will muscle and make some meaningful decisions that can, if successful, invigorate your soul.

It's the real thing! The difficult path, the realistic road, may be harder to take, but it is the way to real and lasting results. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

The Brain's Sim Card

"Memory is most essential to human existence because we need to learn from our experiences. A little child doesn't know that he shouldn't touch a hot stove. However, once he touches it the memory is always there and from that point he will be careful. If the memory was erased from his mind, he would always be in danger.

The Sim card in our brains is a kindness of Hashem, based on unforgettable experiences it trains our stimuli to avoid negative experiences. (Norman D. Levy, Based on Rabbi Miller's, Duties of the Mind.)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Maintaining Enthusiasm for Misvot

Parashat Behaalotecha begins with the Misva of the Menorah, which was kindled by the Kohen each afternoon in the Bet Hamikdash. The Torah outlines the basic requirements of this Misva, and then concludes, "Va'ya'as Ken Aharon"—"Aharon did so." Meaning, Aharon, the Kohen Gadol, complied with this command and kindled the Menorah as he was commanded.

Rashi, commenting on this verse, writes that the Torah here gives praise to Aharon "She'lo Shina"—because he did not deviate from G-d's command. This is the meaning of "Va'ya'as Ken Aharon"—that Aharon is praiseworthy for doing as he was told and not deviating from G-d's instructions.

The question naturally arises as to why Aharon was deserving of special praise for complying with this command. If we were given an explicit command from Hashem, wouldn't we eagerly abide? Moreover, Aharon was not just given a command, but also blessed with a special privilege, of being the first one to ever kindle the Menorah in the Mishkan. Is it not obvious that he would do as he was told? Why does he deserve special praise for fulfilling the command of the Menorah?

To answer this question, we might observe the way a Bar Mitzva boy approaches the Misva of Tefillin after his Bar Mitzva. When he puts them on for the first time, he is overjoyed and takes special pride in his new pair of Tefillin. He lovingly places the box on his arm, recites the Beracha and wraps the strap. Gradually, however, the excitement wanes, and just a year or so later, he puts on his Tefillin thoughtlessly, hardly even thinking about the fact that he is fulfilling a Biblical command. This is what naturally happens when we grow accustomed to something. The initial excitement and enthusiasm gradually diminishes, and we perform the action perfunctorily, without much feeling or emotion.

The Sages cited by Rashi praise Aharon "She'lo Shina," which literally means, "because he did not change." The enthusiasm with which he kindled the Menorah the first time remained throughout the years. Each and every time he performed the Misva, he did it with the same excitement and awe with which he had kindled the lamps the first time.

How we do follow Aharon's example? How can we retain some level of excitement and enthusiasm for the actions we perform each and every day, such as prayer, Berachot, Sisit and Tefillin?

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**Rabbi Wein
HOT SUMMERS**

As all of us here in Israel can attest to, the intense heat of the past weeks has clearly announced to us that summer has arrived. The Mediterranean type of climate that Israel enjoys is balanced by its proximity to the desert areas that make up a large part of the landmass of the Middle East. We here in Jerusalem are spared the intense humidity and discomfort that visits the coastal areas of Israel during the summer. The weather in Israel is quite predictable and the absence of rain is a hallmark of the summer season. There can be a passing shower but rarely if ever is there a rainstorm of note from after Shavuot until Sukkoth.

We see from the Bible itself that the prophet Samuel used a rainstorm in the middle of the summer as a miracle to show the people the greatness of God's guidance over the people of Israel and their land. Because of the regularity of the weather patterns here in Israel during the summer we hardly take notice of the day to day changes in temperature and even during periods of extreme heat we go on with our daily lives without notable disturbance to our schedules and tasks.

We know that we live in a hot climate and so be it. We are told by our health practitioners to drink a great deal of water on a daily basis and to stay indoors as much as possible during heat waves. However, judging by the ever-increasing traffic on the streets of Jerusalem, both vehicular and pedestrian, it seems that a great many Jerusalem citizens have chosen to ignore the previous advice mentioned and go on with their lives as usual.

There was a time just a few short decades ago when air-conditioning was a novelty in homes, stores and offices in Israel. And even when available it was not easily used because of the high price of electricity. All of this has naturally changed and today almost everything and everybody in the country has access

to air-conditioning to relieve the rigors of living in a hot climate.

Air-conditioning is one of the many luxuries of life that once a person experiences it, inevitably it becomes a necessity. The famed Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant said that all luxuries eventually become necessities, and this certainly has proven to be the case regarding air conditioning here in Israel during our hot summers.

I think that perhaps part of the reason why Israeli synagogues in general did not easily tolerate sermons from rabbis during the Shabbat morning services is that the room was so hot and stifling that to inflict another 20 minutes of having to remain there was considered cruel and unusual punishment. The reticence to allow for rabbinic sermons during the Shabbat morning services, which continues in today's Israeli synagogues, only proves how beloved customs are to the Jewish people, though circumstances changed and one could enjoy words of Torah in air-conditioned splendor, this ritual was maintained.

Generally speaking, Israel has a healthy and balanced climate. It has moderate winters and hot summers and does not usually suffer from the vagaries of extreme temperature changes that exist in other parts of the world. We have a great deal of sunshine and the Lord blesses us annually with sufficient rainfall to allow us to continue and prosper.

I remember the bitter winters of cold and snow that I experienced in Chicago and later in Monsey and I am amazed that I considered that type of weather normal then. But the severe weather in the northern part of the United States accounts and explains the continuing migration to southern and western states that have warmer winters and hot summers.

Human beings are the most adaptable of creatures and have been able to live in every climate on our planet. I find it amazing that the Eskimos in Alaska have not yet picked up and moved to Florida. The rabbis, in their inimitable fashion, say that people find grace and goodness in the place that they live. Apparently, this applies even if the climate appears to be unacceptable to others who do not live there. The Lord provided air-conditioned comfort for the Jewish people during their 40-year stay in the desert of Sinai. However, this luxury disappeared when we entered the land of Israel and came to live as a natural people in a natural climate. So, even though today is quite warm, I am writing this article with the windows open and the air-conditioner closed because part of the joy of living in Israel is experiencing the hot summer.

Rabbi Yosef Farhi Humble Power

Here is the sequence of events discussed towards the end of our Parasha: The Jews complain to Moshe about their heaven-sent Mannah. They would rather have the natural produce from Egypt. They want meat. Moshe tells G-d, "Kill me now; just don't punish Your people!... I can't carry the weight of this nation alone! I can never supply all the meat they want!... Even G-d can't supply all the meat they want!" How strange for Moshe to ask G-d, at this point, to kill him instead of punishing the Nation, something he asked of G-d only at the sin of the Golden Calf! Also, why was Moshe saying that he could not help the people? Wasn't he the 'superman' sent from G-d to bring on the 10 Plagues, take the Jews out of Egypt, split the sea, and bring the Torah down from the sky? Relative to these monumental achievements, bringing meat for the nation was not a miracle of such proportions that it would be hard for Moshe to ask it of G-d. And how strange for him to say that G-d can't supply the nation with meat!!!

G-d responds that He will take away part of Moshe's prophecy and give it to the seventy elders, so that they will have a share in prophecy. Moshe knows that 70 can't be divided by 12, and he wanted an equal number for all 12 Tribes. So, Moshe took 6 from each tribe and wrote on only 70 out of 72 notes the word "Elder". Ironically, Eldad and Medad, the two that were left out from the 70, ended up receiving prophecy, and their prophecy was something that shook the whole Jewish Nation to the core: "Moshe will die, and Yehoshua will bring the Nation into the Land of Israel!"

The two reasons that we know why Moshe needed to die and not bring the people into E Yisrael, were the following: A. When he was first sent to Pharaoh, and as a result, things only got worse, Moshe questioned G-d. (see Rashi, Shemot 6;1 and see Sifte Chachamim there) B. When Moshe struck the rock with his staff to get water, and lost the opportunity to bring about a higher level of Kiddush Hashem (Bamidbar 20;12). This prophecy of Moshe's death, at this point, seems so out of place. Why did it need to come out right after the Jews complained about the Mannah?

And one more episode, before the Parasha concludes. Miriam spoke to her brother Aharon about Moshe, regarding Moshe's separating from his wife, Tziporah, and questioned if Moshe should be different from other prophets. Specifically at this point, the Torah says about Moshe, **וְהָאִישׁ מִנְּשֵׂה עִבְיָו מֵאֲדָם מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה** And the man Moshe was more humble than all the men that were on the face of the earth. Moshe's humility is evident in so

many places in the Torah. Why is it necessary to mention it at this specific place?

We opened with the complaining of the Jews. What were the Jews of the Desert complaining about? Such holy, wise, angelic men? They did not want to be so angelic!!! They did not want heaven-sent food, and to be so dependent on G-d! After all, Moshe, I am here in the desert with a very large family, and the only food I can rely on is this Mannah! How irresponsible of me to be so dependent! In Egypt, I had normal food, natural food. I wasn't so dependent on G-d, so irresponsible toward my family.

An assault on the Manna was an assault on Moshe, in whose merit we have the Manna. Moshe was the most humble of men, in the sense that no one views himself dependent on G-d to the same degree that Moshe did. Moshe can get them Manna, dependency, but he can't get them a feeling of security without G-d! Even G-d, no matter how much meat He would provide - if a person is looking for a feeling of security without G-d, there will never be enough. And, when someone wants security, when he wants to manage without G-d, G-d doesn't help him. Instead, G-d says, "If you want to manage on your own, go ahead and try".

This is why at this point, the prophecy came out that Moshe would need to die and would not bring Klal Yisrael into E Yisrael. Because this is the point where the Nation lost their merit of having Moshe, a Man of Miracles, as their leader. "If you want to manage without miracles, if you want to fight without feeling total dependence in G-d, Yehoshua will have to take you in. Not Moshe." Moshe's needing to die was a catalyst for the next Parasha, the story of the Jews' fear when they heard from the Spies how they had no hope of being victorious over the 7 nations in a natural manner.

Recent studies have shown that the best CEO's are the most humble. For years, philosophers and psychologists frowned on 'humility', saying that it showed character weakness. This is because the concept 'humility' is often misunderstood. Humility is defined in the Miriam Webster Dictionary as a modest or low view of one's own importance. For this reason, people have a misconception about humility, thinking that it means to regard yourself as a 'shmatteh'. R' Shach would say that this cannot be what humility is, because how, then, would we understand Moshe's teaching this passuk of Torah to the whole nation, expounding on how he was, is and will always be the most humble person ever?!

The Orchos Tzaddikim tell us, clearly, what humility is and how to achieve it. At its root, real humility is recognizing one's complete dependence on G-d and acknowledging that all the good you have is not because you deserve it, but because G-d, in His everlasting kindness, wanted you to have it. The

hardcore truth of humility is that we don't know where we are going in life, until we have one foot in the grave. We do not know if things will be better or worse, although we hope for the best, because we are totally dependent on G-d.

How humble you are, how undeserving you feel, or how dependent in G-d you feel, is evident from the way you respond when faced with disrespect. So many people feel like a Shmatteh when faced with insult, only because they feel that they deserve more respect, or they feel that they have importance, independent of G-d. They are just surrendering because they don't have any options, power, or courage to do anything about the given situation. That is being a Shmatteh; that is not being humble! Of all people, Moshe felt the most obligated to G-d, the most underserving, the most dependent - and proof of it was revealed only now, when the closest person to him, his sister, Miriam, who saved his life, compared him to other prophets, and he did not respond, although he had the power to! Because he felt, "I do not deserve to be a prophet on a higher level than others; if G-d wants me to lose my level of prophecy, I will lose it, and the strengths that are G-d-given just make me more obligated to Him". This is how we can understand the sequence at the end of our Parasha.

We lost Moshe, because we did not want what he stood for! If we want miracles in life, we need to start feeling more dependent, more undeserving, and more obligated to G-d. G-d never forgets our original faith, our dependency in Him, following Him into the desert without any plan for survival. G-d remembered our Chessed with Him and did not annihilate us at the time of Exile in Yirimiyahu's days. ר'י אהבת פלולת'יך לכת'ך זה אמר יקוץ זכרתי לך חסד נעו אהרי במדבר בארץ לא זרושה (Yirmiyahu Ch. 2) He even refers to such faith as doing Chessed with G-d. What?! Does G-d need our Chessed?! Of course not! But if there is anything that we can do for G-d that even resembles chessed, it is to be dependent on Him, and on Him alone. (See Homat Anach from the Chida, *ibid.*)

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Faith and Friendship

In this week's parsha Moshe reaches his lowest ebb. Not surprisingly. After all that had happened – the miracles, the exodus, the division of the sea, food from heaven, water from a rock, the revelation at Sinai and the covenant that went with it – the people, yet again, were complaining about the food. And not because they were hungry; merely because they were bored. "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free—and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic." As for

the miraculous "bread from heaven," although it sustained them it had ceased to satisfy them: "Now our appetite is gone; there's nothing to look at but this manna!"[1]

Any leader might despair at such a moment. What is striking is the depth of Moses' despair, the candour with which he expresses it, and the blazing honesty of the Torah in telling us this story. This is what he says to God:

"Why have You brought this trouble on Your servant? What have I done to displease You that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do You tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land You promised on oath to their ancestors?... If this is how You are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favour in Your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."[2]

Every leader, perhaps every human being, at some time in their lives faces failure, defeat and the looming abyss of despair. What is fascinating is God's response. He does not tell Moses, "Cheer up; pull yourself together; you are bigger than this." Instead He gives him something practical to do:

"Gather for Me seventy of the elders of Israel... I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself."

It is as if God were saying to Moses, "Remember what your father-in-law Jethro told you. Do not try to lead alone. Do not try to live alone.[3] Even you, the greatest of the prophets, are still human, and humans are social animals. Enlist others. Choose associates. End your isolation. Have friends."

What is moving about this episode is that, at the moment of Moses' maximum emotional vulnerability, God Himself speaks to Moses as a friend. This is fundamental to Judaism as a whole. For us God is not (merely) Creator of the universe, Lord of history, Sovereign, Lawgiver and Redeemer, the God of capital-letter nouns. He is also close, tender, loving: "He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3). He is like a parent: "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you" (Is. 66:13). He is like a shepherd; "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me" (Ps. 23:4). He is always there: "God is close to all who call on Him – to all who call on Him in truth" (Ps. 145:18).

In 2006, in the fittingly named Hope Square outside London's Liverpool Street Station, a memorial was erected in memory of Kindertransport, the operation that rescued 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi Germany shortly before the outbreak of war. At the ceremony one of the speakers, a woman by then in her eighties who was one of the saved, spoke movingly about the warmth she felt toward the country that had given refuge to her and her fellow kinder. In her speech she said something that left an indelible impression on me. She said, "I discovered that in England a policeman could be a friend." That is what made England so different from Germany. And it is what Jews discovered long ago about God Himself. He is not just a supreme power. He is also a friend. That is what Moses discovered in this week's parsha.

Friends matter. They shape our lives. How much they do so was discovered by two social scientists, Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, using data from the Framingham Heart Study. This project, started in 1948, has followed more than 15,000 residents of Framingham, Massachusetts, examining their heart rate, weight, blood levels and other health indicators, on average every four years. Its purpose was to identify risk factors for heart disease. However, Christakis and Fowler were interested in something else, namely the effects of socialization. Does it make a difference to your health whether you have friends, and if so, what kind of people they are?

Their discoveries were impressive. Not only does having friends matter; so too does having the right ones. If your friends are slim, active, happy and have healthy habits, the likelihood is that so will you, and the same is true of the reverse. Another study, in 2000, showed that if at college, you have a roommate who works hard at his or her studies, the probability is that you will work harder. A Princeton study in 2006 showed that if one of your siblings has a child, you are 15% more likely to do so within the next two years. Habits are contagious. They spread through social networks. Even your friends' friends and their friends can still have an influence on your behaviour.[4]

Jordan Peterson, in his 12 Rules for Life, marshals his own experience and that of his contemporaries, growing up in the small, isolated town of Fairview, Alberta. Those who chose upwardly mobile individuals as friends went on to success. Those who fell into bad company fared badly, sometimes disastrously. We can choose the wrong friends, he says, precisely because they boost our self-image. If we have a fault and know we do, we can find

reassurance in the fact that the people we associate with have the same fault. This soothes our troubled mind but at the price of making it almost impossible to escape our deficiencies. Hence his Rule 3: Make friends with people who want the best for you.[5]

None of this would come as a surprise to the sages, who pointed out, for example, that the key figures in the Korach rebellion were encamped near one another. From this they concluded, "Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbour." In the opposite direction, the tribes of Yehudah, Issachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moses and Aaron, and they became distinguished for their expertise in Torah. Hence, "Happy the righteous and happy his neighbour." [6] Hence Maimonides' axiom:

It is natural to be influenced in character and conduct by your friends and associates, and to follow the fashions of your fellow citizens. Therefore one ought to ensure that your friends are virtuous and that you frequent the company of the wise so that you learn from the way they live, and that you keep a distance from bad company.[7]

Or, as the sages put it more briefly: "Make for yourself a mentor and acquire for yourself a friend." [8]

In the end that is what God did for Moses, and it ended his depression. He told him to gather around him seventy elders who would bear the burden of leadership with him. There was nothing they could do that Moses could not: he did not need their practical or spiritual help. But they did alleviate his isolation. They shared his spirit. They gave him the gift of friendship. We all need it. We are social animals. "It is not good to be alone." [9]

It is part of the intellectual history of the West and the fact that from quite early on, Christianity became more Hellenistic than Hebraic, that people came to think that the main purpose of religion is to convey information (about the origin of the universe, miracles, life after death, and so on). Hence the conflict between religion and science, revelation and reason, faith and demonstration. These are false dichotomies.

Judaism has foundational beliefs, to be sure, but it is fundamentally about something else altogether. For us, faith is the redemption of solitude. It is about relationships – between us and God, us and our family, us and our neighbours, us and our people, us and humankind. Judaism is not about the lonely soul. It is about the bonds that bind us to one another and

to the Author of all. It is, in the highest sense, about friendship.

Hence the life changing idea: we tend to become what our friends are. So choose as friends people who are what you aspire to be.

Rav Kook on the Perasha A Short Prayer for Miriam

When Miriam was stricken with leprosy, Moses beseeched God to heal his sister, saying a remarkably brief prayer: "Please God, please heal her" (Num. 12:13). The Talmud (Berachot 34a) took note of the unusual brevity of this prayer in the following story:

Once, a student led the prayers in Rabbi Eliezer's house of study, and his prayers were unusually lengthy. The other students complained, "Master, how slow this fellow is!"

Rabbi Eliezer responded to them, "He is no slower than Moses, who pleaded on behalf of the Jewish people [after the sin of the golden calf] for forty days and forty nights."

On another occasion, a different student led the prayers. This student recited the prayers quickly. The other students complained, "How hasty this fellow is!"

This time Rabbi Eliezer replied, "He is no hastier than Moses, who pleaded for his sister's recovery with a few short words."

What determined the length of Moses' prayers? Why did his own sister merit only a brief, one-line prayer?

Two Types of Prayer

Prayer serves two functions. The first function is to refine character traits and deepen awareness — either for the person praying, or for the one being prayed for. This type of prayer requires tenacity and perseverance, since correction of flawed traits requires extended effort, and usually occurs gradually over time.

For this reason, Moses needed to pray extensively when he prayed for the Jewish people after the calamitous sin of the golden calf. Why forty days? This period is the time it takes for an embryo to develop limbs and become recognizable as a human fetus. The forty days of Moses' prayer indicated a rebirth of the Jewish people, with a new heart and spirit.

There is, however, a second function of prayer. Sometimes the inner emotions and character traits have already been refined and purified. Prayer only comes to put in words that which already exists in the inner soul. In such cases, an extended prayer is unnecessary; even a brief prayer may express many holy feelings. In the case of Miriam, she had already conceded her mistake. Her healing, both physical and spiritual, required only a short, simple prayer.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 163.)

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "And he called the name of that place 'graves of lust' for there they buried the people that had lusted" (11:34)

Although Hashem had smote them with "a very great plague" (11:33), yet compared to the nation in general only a small number perished. We see that those "that lusted" were the sole culprits, which demonstrates that the survivors who constituted the overwhelming majority were not the lusters.

Above (11:20) it was stated "Because you rejected Hashem that is in your midst", but here they are declared to have been punished for their lust of eating. We learn that the sin of becoming enslaved by desire is equivalent to rejecting Hashem. To serve Him "with all your heart" requires freedom from everything else, and to be enslaved by excessive passion for anything is equivalent to rejecting Hashem.

In addition, men that are never satisfied but always lust for more and newer pleasures are never truly appreciative and grateful to Hashem. And because the chief function of life is gratitude, they are undeserving of the gift of life.

The purpose of life is not the pursuit of pleasures but rather the pursuit of Perfection and of finding favor in the sight of Hashem. The seeker of Perfection is justified in living properly and even happily, but Hashem desires that His people should never lose sight of the supreme intention for which He created them: To know Hashem.

Quoted from "Journey
Into Greatness" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L